Conference on Disarmament

27 August 2014

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Note verbale dated 22 August 2014 from the Permanent Mission of Austria addressed to the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament transmitting the text of the paper entitled "Addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Nayarit, Mexico and Vienna" submitted by Austria to the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons[1]

The Permanent Mission of Austria presents its compliments to the Acting Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament and has the honour to transmit herewith the paper entitled "Addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Nayarit, Mexico and Vienna" submitted by Austria to the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The Permanent Mission of Austria would appreciate it if the paper could be issued as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament and distributed to all member States and non-member participants of the Conference.

[1] Previously issued as document of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons under symbol NPT/CONF.2015/PC.III/WP.30 of 24 April 2014 as attached.

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Addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons as the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in Oslo, Nayarit, Mexico and Vienna

Working paper submitted by Austria

1. One of the key goals of the international community in the negotiations of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and the driving force of the Treaty's subsequent success in achieving its high level of universality, is encapsulated in the first preambular paragraph of the Treaty: "Considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples ... ".

2. The 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons gave specific focus, inter alia, to this issue in its consensual conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions (2010 action plan) by expressing "its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons". Moreover, the Conference resolved in action 1 of the action plan that "All States parties commit to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons." Thus, by advancing the key goal of the Treaty to achieve a world without nuclear weapons and implementing action 1 of the action plan, the international community has increased its focus on addressing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, including through international conferences specifically dedicated to this issue.

3. The Government of Norway hosted the first international conference in Oslo in March 2013. It provided an arena for the international community — including governmental experts from 128 States, international organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society — to have a facts-based discussion about the humanitarian and developmental consequences that would result from a nuclear weapon detonation and about disaster preparedness. The main conclusions were that (a) no State or international body could address the immediate humanitarian emergency caused by a nuclear weapon detonation in any meaningful way; (b) no existing national or international emergency system would be able to provide adequate assistance to the victims; and (c) there would be serious long-term effects that would not be constrained by national borders.

4. Following this model, Mexico hosted the second international conference in Nayarit in February 2014. Experts from 146 States, international organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society confirmed the initial findings of the Oslo conference and deepened their understanding of the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons, including the long-term effects on socioeconomic development and the environment, as well as on health. Furthermore, the risk of nuclear weapon use was considered to be growing globally, including the risk of accidental, mistaken, unauthorized or intentional use. Efforts towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons comprise multiple actions and mutually reinforcing processes such as promoting the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, achieving a comprehensive outcome in the 2015 Review Conference and discussing the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons. The High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on Nuclear Disarmament, held in 2013, also provided positive impulses.

5. During the Nayarit conference, Austria offered to host the third international conference on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, scheduled to take place in December 2014. In his announcement for the media, Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sebastian Kurz stated that: "Nuclear weapons are not only a permanent threat to all humankind but also a relic of the cold war that we must finally overcome. Nuclear disarmament is a global task and a collective responsibility. As a member State committed to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Austria wants to do its share to achieve the goals of this Treaty." Austria will prepare the third international conference in an inclusive manner, building upon the findings and experience of the conferences held in Oslo and Nayarit.

6. Building on the preamble of the Treaty and pursuing the Treaty's goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons as well as implementing the 2010 action plan, the broad-based and comprehensive discussions on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons that have taken place in Oslo and Nayarit — and later in Vienna in 2014 — underscore growing support to anchor the humanitarian imperative firmly in discussions about nuclear weapons and nuclear disarmament.

7. Better awareness of the devastating humanitarian impact and consequences of nuclear weapons builds momentum for the urgency of achieving nuclear disarmament and results in greater understanding of the need to eliminate this risk. The international community has an obligation to move forward with urgency, including on the basis of article VI of the Treaty, to achieve the elimination and prohibition of nuclear weapons. Facts-based discussions at the international conferences can assist States, together with civil society, in achieving this important result and the goal of the Treaty.